
Women for Change: A Panacea for National Development-A Case Study of Adamawa State

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Abstract

Centuries ago, women were seen as only good for reproduction and care of the home. Little did the world know that training a woman is as good as training a nation. Women feminist movements and scholars were critical of earlier theories about society, existential conditions and about socio-political development, which were regarded as male bias against women. Women and their male supporters then sought to redress the situation, engaged in a struggle including challenges and crusades, to change men's perspectives about society through their own favourable lens and destroy male biased images of gender and sexism. This paper looked into various perspectives of gender and feminists movements, the various kinds of empowerment programmes marshaled to uplift the status of women, what impact-educated women have played in the development of the Nigeria and Adamawa state in particular

Women and feminist agitation has been that of women liberation from oppression, subordination, marginalization and devaluation, which were inflicted on them through legal statutes, cultural practices and brutish physical forces by men including their husbands, their male bosses, rapist and soldiers in war situations. Women struggles for freedom and self-emancipation have functioned as catalyst for women development of their ability and successes in self- protection. In almost all societies, gender is a significant form of social stratification. Gender is a critical factor in structuring the types of opportunities and life chances faced by individuals and groups and strongly influences the roles they play within social institution from the

household to the state. In almost every culture, women bear the primary responsibility for child care and domestic work, while men have traditionally borne the primary responsibility for providing the family livelihood. The prevailing division of labour between the sexes has led to men and women assuming unequal positions in terms of power, prestige and wealth.

Despite the advances made by women in countries around the world, gender differences continue to serve as basis for social inequalities. Many theoretical perspectives have been advanced to explain men's enduring dominance over women- in the realm of economics, politics, the family and else where. Women were discriminated against by stereotypes which restricted them to a reproductive role, and deprived them the access to resources which could have enhanced their social and economic contribution to the society. The ultimate goal of women and feminist organized struggle is social change with special reference to equality with men in all aspect of social life. This goal has been achieved to various degrees in different societies of the world, starting from some of the Euro- American societies where it was first formulated, to the culture resistant societies of China, Asia and Africa.

Different Approaches to Gender Issues

Giddens. (2008) identified two approaches of gender issues, which include functionalist and feminist approaches. Functional approach, he points ,sees society as a system of inter-linked parts , which when in balance operate smoothly to produce social solidarity. Thus functionalist inspired perspective on gender he note, seek to that gender differences contribute to social stability and integration. While such view once commanded great support, they have been heavily criticized for neglecting social tensions at the expense of consensus and for promulgating a conservative view of the social world.

Giddens notes that the competing schools of feminism have sought to explain gender inequalities through a variety of deeply embedded social processes, such as sexism, patriarchy and capitalism. Liberal feminism he identified looks for explanations of gender inequalities in social and cultural attitudes. A contribution from the English philosopher John Stuart Mill in his essay, '*The subjection of women*' (1869), called for legal and political equality between the sexes, including right to vote. In recent decades, he noted that feminists have campaigned against sexism and discrimination against women in the workplace, educational institutions and the media. They tend to focus their energies on establishing and protecting equal opportunities for women through legislation and other democratic means. Giddens further notes that in the UK, legal advances such as the Equal Pay Act (1970) and The Sex Discrimination Act (1975) were actively supported by liberal feminists, who argued that enshrining equality in law is important, to eliminating discrimination against women. A liberal feminist seeks to work through the existing system to bring about reform in a gradual way.

The socialist feminist, Marx in collaboration with his friend Friedrich Engel, view gender inequality to capitalism and patriarchy. They argued that under capitalism, material and economic factors under lay women's subservience to men, because patriarchy (like class oppression) has its roots in private property. That Capitalism intensifies patriarchy which reveals men's domination over women- by concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a small number of men. Socialist feminists have argued that the reformist goals of liberal feminism are inadequate, they have called for the restructuring of the family, the end of 'domestic slavery' and the introduction of some collective means of carrying out child-rearing, caring and household maintenance.

Change in the Modern Period

The last two hundred years have witnessed the period of modernity and tremendous acceleration in women's speed of social change. These are linked to cultural, economic and political influences. Robert and Hite. (1999), noted that both the development of science and the secularization of thought contributed to the critical and innovative character of the modern outlook. Where people no longer assume that customs or habits are acceptable, merely because they have age-old authority of tradition. They further stressed that the way of life of people on the contrary, increasingly require a 'Rational' basis. Also , that the change in content of idea, wherein ideals of self- betterment , freedom , equality and democratic participation are largely creations of the past two or three centuries. Such ideals have served to mobilize processes of social and political change including revolution. These ideas, they said cannot be tied to tradition but rather, suggest the constant revision of ways of life in the pursuit of human betterment.

Robert and Hite. (1999) identified industrial capitalism as the most far – reaching influence on change in the modern period. Capitalism differs in fundamental ways from pre-existing production systems, because it involves the constant expansion of production and the over increasing accumulation of wealth. Capitalism, they noted, promoted, a process into which science is increasingly drawn. They further identified political development that is the struggles between nations to expand their power develop their wealth and triumph militarily over their competitors.

As globalization progresses, existing political structure and models appear unequipped to manage a world full of the challenges that transcend national borders. It is not within the capacity of individual government to control the spread of aids to counter the effects of global warming or to regulate volatile financial markets. Many of the processes affecting societies around the world elude the grasp of current governing mechanisms. Though, there have been creations of global democratic structure such as United Nations and the European Union, yet new forms of global government could help to promote a cosmopolitan world order in which transparent rules and standard for international behaviour such as the defense of human rights are established and observed.

Women: Emergence of a Collective Consciousness

Richard. (2006), enumerated the emergence of change in women consciousness identifying it to have begun in New York (United State) as a feminists movement , in a town called Seneca Falls, in the summer of 1848 . He explained that on July 19th, the first women's right convection began, attended by Elizabeth Cady Staitan, Lucretia Mott, and other pioneers in the struggle for women's right. This first wave of feminists, (as they are currently known), battled ridicule and scorn as they fought for legal and political equality for women. They were not afraid to risk controversy on behalf of their course. In 1872, Susan .B. Anthony was arrested for attempting to vote in that years presidential election. Ultimately, the early feminists won many victories, among them, was the passage and ratification of the nineteenth amendment to the constitution, which granted women the right to vote in national elections beginning in 1920. In the early and middle 20th century, the women's movement became a much powerful force for social change.

The second wave of feminists in the United States emerged in the 1960s and come to fill force in the 1970s. In part, the movement was inspired by three pioneering books arguing for women's right. The books were Betty Friedan's "The Feminine" Mystique ,(1963) , Simone de Beauvoir's 'the second sex' and Kate Millet's "sexual politics" in addition , the general political activism of the 1960s let women, (many of who were working for Black Civil Right or against the war in Vietnam) to examine their own powerlessness . The sexism often found within allegedly progressive and radical political circles, convinced many women that they needed to establish their own movement for women liberation (Evans 1980, Firestone 1970, Freeman 1973, 1975). A sense of sisterhood much like would like the class- consciousness that Mark hoped would emerge in the proletariat became evident. Individual women identified their interest with those of the collectivity women. No longer were women happy in submissive, subordinate roles ('false consciousnesses in Marxist terms).

The women's movement has undertaken public protests on a wide range of issues and this yielded a positive response such as , government subsidies for childcare – e.g Sweden and Denmark providing government subsidized childcare for children under the age three in 2001, and other countries like United States, France , Germany (Mencimer 2002; Hank 2001; L. king 1998). The affirmative action for women and minorities ; -first issued by president John F. Kennedy in 1961, revisited by president Lyndon Johnson in 1967 , to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex; National gender policy for Nigeria, 2006. Currently, affirmative action refers to positive efforts to recruit minority group members or women for jobs, promotions, and educational opportunities (Richard, 2006)

Women for Change and Development

Women, have in one way or the other affected the world politics (the like of Margaret Thatcher of England, Indira Ghandi of India, Hilary Clinton of America, Condolise Rice, US Secretary General and many more) the Nigeria women are not left

out of the feminist struggles, as the memory of “Aba Women Riot” against massive tax payment still lingers (Fafunwa, 1974) . The impact of Margaret Ekpo of Calabar, Chief Mrs. Funmilayo Anikulpo kuti , Prof. Allele Williams of University of Benin, Chief (Mrs) Bola Kuforiji Olubi of United Bank of Africa (UBA) , Mrs. Maryam Babangida who championed the course of “Better Life for Rural Women”, Prof. Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala, who helped in reviving the ailing economy of Nigeria and spearheaded the fight that led to the canceling of Nigeria’s debt in Paris club; Prof. Dora Akunyili of NAFDAC that championed the war against fake drugs in Nigeria and ensured importation, sale and use of genuine drugs in our markets, chemist, hospitals and the general public.

The influence of late Stella Obasanjo encouraged the inclusion of many women in the cabinet of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Turai Yar’Adua also played her part in the programme of women emancipation, presently Dame Patience Goodluck Jonathan is carrying a crusade of “Women for Change Initiative”, agitating for 35% involvement or inclusion of women in political post come 2011 general election. Women for change initiative is a project based on raising the standard of the average Nigeria woman to help eliminate discrimination of all kinds as well as eradicate poverty in the land. It is also championing the review and revision of laws considered being inimical to the welfare and peaceful existence of women, such as tax laws, Land Use Act of 1976, marriage laws, Inheritance Act and even Electoral Act; issues of high mortality rate, battling with some states of the federation to domesticate the Child Right Act passed by the National Assembly (Ugwu, 2010).

The subsequent creation of the national commission for women and ministerial portfolio for women affair provided additional avenue for the promotion of women related issues and the enhancement of the role women in National Development by way of statutory body and a ministry. Ekong (2006), asserted that women are the real engine driving the economy of Nigeria Nation and are the keys to development and therefore, crucial to the goal of sustainable development. Agbola (1990), confirmed the assertion by concluding that women are the operator the economy and constitute a major arm of the labour force, and that Nigerian women are dynamic, industrious and resourceful.

Major Challenges/Weaknesses

Nigeria women have made significant effort in promoting gender equality and integration into the development process, but there are some issues posing as challenges, which are.

- Poverty among women-headed households. As breadwinners of single parent families (Mostly widows), many of them support multigenerational or extended families. The general increase in the size of the average family increases the burden of care.
- Gender biased analysis: - There has been strong gender differences existing in politics and other related professions. Women have not duly been represented due to resistance by their men folk who feel that some executive or political posts like

Presidency, Governorship and Senate President should exclusively be left for (men-remember the incidence in the lower house) of the first female speaker of the house,

position	No. of available seats	No of women elected /appointed	No of men elected/ appointed	Percentage of women representation (%)
Governorship	1	0	1	0
Deputy Governorship	1	0	1	0
Senate	3	1	2	33.3
Federal house of representative	8	1	7	12.5
State House of Assembly	25	1	24	4
Local Government Chairmanship	21	0	21	0
Local Government Deputy Chairmanship	21	0	21	0
Councillorship	226	10	216	4.428
State Development Area	37	3	34	8.11
Commissioner	20	3	18	10.0

Hon. Patricia Etteh, on the basis that she over spent or rather misappropriated the fund for the renovation of her apartment, it is evident that many male speakers before her, have done that previously during their regime without any opposition or eyebrow.

Below is the table showing women representation in elected/appointed position in Adamawa state between 2007- 2010 and federal house.

Source; Federal Ministry of Women Affair and Social Development (2010)

Note

Of the 360 seats in the house of representative, men have 333 seats while the women have 27 seats; at the senate level, the total number is 109 seats which the men have 101seat while women have only 8 seats’

With the above data we can vividly ascertain the disparities. There are not differences in what we have on ground in other states.

Conclusion

Women have proved very capable of effective representation over the years. They have been able to produce a speaker to the Federal House of Representatives in 2007, the Deputy Governor of Anambra State turned the Governor in 2008, Women participating effectively in different elective and appointed political positions in the States. It is also not out of place to note that women have risen to the prestigious position of Accountant General of a State, EFCC boss , Bank Chief Executives, Okpeke(Ms) also is representing women in the marine world and so on .Senator Grace

Bent Jackson, Barr. Aishatu.B.Tukur and Hon.Hanatu.S.Kadala have also creditably represented the women in politics in Adamawa state.

While acknowledging that much has been done to sharpen people's awareness of gender inequalities yet our society is run by male- dominated institutions

Recommendation

In view of the fundamental role of women in National Development, there is need for the government and also the National Institutions to reach a consensus based on these premises to ensure the success of development policies which are, that;

- *Women too are agents of change.* That is, realizing their potentialities, and recognizing their role in policy making.
- *Custom and tradition is the product of society and as such are subject to modification.* That is, equal recognition for men and women, cultural demands not withstanding. The constitutional rights granted to women in texts and legislation should help to mitigate the discriminatory effect of ingrained (firmly established and hard to change) cultural norms, which are often seen as the society's only reference points.
- *The National Economy and Development are in the hands of both men and women.* That is, the way to consolidate women's place and role within the process of rural development is through promoting their abilities to recognize and to negotiate for a just profit.
- *Partnership between all the members of the community is possible.* That is, the history of every country, distant and recent, as well as current development projects demonstrates that women are ready to take their place in the forefront of effort to develop society. However, men must be genuine partners in this, convinced of the importance of women's participation in decisions concerning the work unit, the family and the community. (Internet extract, 2010)

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